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# STATE CARE OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN.

BY HENRIETTA CHRISTIAN WRIGHT.

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THE history of the state care of children the world over has been that of the workhouse or almshouse. In France, indeed, boarding out seems to have been applied widely as early as 1450, when an ordinance was passed regulating the salaries of the nurses and agents employed in caring for pauper children in country homes. Fosterage existed even earlier in England, where, in the reign of Edward III., an Act was passed forbidding English children from being cared for by Irish foster parents, as it had been found that such care denationalized the children and made them Irish rather than English in sympathy. But, with these and a few minor exceptions, the pauper children of Europe, and later those of America and the European colonies, were for generations cared for in institutions. The literature of the subject includes volumes of statistics which attest the evils of the workhouse and the almshouse, where the children were herded with adult paupers, and from under whose jurisdiction they passed into the world notoriously unfit for anything but lives of pauperism and lowest crime.

The efforts of private individuals at last rescued the workhouse waifs, and placed them in institutions set apart for the care of children alone. Here the child was made cleanly in habit, and amenable to discipline, while ophthalmia, scrofula and other diseases inherent in institution life showed some signs of abatement. But when the child left the institution, it was found that he still lacked in the great essential to success—capacity. From the system of constant espionage and guidance, and the reduction to mechanical routine of all the ordinary offices of life, the child had become dulled in faculty, unthinking, and dependent. In the institution, he had been, during the formative period of his life, a “number,” and he “ate, drank, studied, marched, played and slept

in companies, platoons and regiments." A visitor to one institution found a class of boys between eleven and thirteen years of age who had never brushed their own hair, the matron having found it easier to stand them in rows and perform this service for them, than to teach each individual boy how to do it for himself. Hundreds of girls in their teens left the institutions yearly who had never made a fire, placed a tea kettle to boil, or performed any of the minor household duties so necessary to their training as domestic servants. It was, in fact, discovered that the child, who, at great expense to the state, had been fed and taught for a long period of years, was less capable of earning his living, than the youth who had grown up "half naked and half starved" in his parents' cottage in the peat bogs of Ireland.

The pauper child, helpless and hopeless, had made an appeal to nature, and nature had avenged him. In place of the promise of youth and the ideals which were to guarantee the security of the state, she returned, for value received, the institutionalized youth, a drag upon society, and, in the end, an added burden to the taxpayer. Grave as were these defects, there was added the still graver one that institutions increased juvenile pauperism. Wherever a new institution arose, there sprang up, as if from the ground, hundreds of applicants for admission. The idle and vicious parents eagerly took advantage of the means thus offered for the support of their children during the non-wage earning period; and, with every new gift of a costly edifice, the state found itself putting a premium upon the poverty it was vainly endeavoring to stamp out.

In the meantime a remedy for the evil had already arisen. In 1828, an Education Inquiry Commission, reporting upon the condition of the Protestant Charter Schools of Ireland, found so discreditable a state of things that the schools were abolished, no provision being made meanwhile for the orphans of that faith. Not long afterwards, three Protestant Irish working men, considering it their duty to care for the children of a comrade who had just died, started a subscription of a penny a week, and, with the sum of three pence as capital, found a refuge for the children among some respectable laboring people of their own faith.

On the ruins of the Charter Schools arose, from the act of these working men, the Protestant Orphan Society of Ireland, which has been the parent of the modern system of boarding out

the dependent children of the state. The methods of this society have been sustained, in the main, by succeeding organizations. The orphans were placed, as far as possible, in the families of small farmers, or laborers, whose station in life corresponded to their own. In every case, the children were given into the charge of the mother of the family, who was made directly responsible for their care. A certificate of character was required from the parish priest and the nearest magistrate, attesting to her "morality and sobriety, to the suitability of her house and family and the possession of one or more cows," while it was also stipulated that she receive no children from the Foundling Hospital or any other charitable institution. The homes were visited by Inspectors, whose reports contained the history of every child while under the care of the society. The Protestant clergyman of each district was also a regular correspondent of the society, and the foster mothers were required to present themselves and their wards at the annual meetings of the society, the society paying the travelling expenses. It was found that the cost under the boarding out system was one-third *per capita* of that expended in institutions, while the rate of mortality was under one per cent. In 1859, thirty-one years after the establishment of the society, the death rate of the children in a single workhouse in Cork was eighty per cent. in one year, while nearly all the survivors were afflicted with scrofula. These horrors were exceeded by the revelations of the Dublin workhouse, which so excited popular indignation that an Act was passed in 1862 authorizing the boarding out of workhouse children.

That the problem of the state care of children was solved by the incorporation of the Protestant Orphan Society of Ireland, is proven by the subsequent history of dependent child life in nearly every civilized quarter of the globe. In places widely separated by geographical limits, as well as by the differences of race and creed, the state care of children is evolving from institutionalism to the natural conditions of home life. England, Ireland, Russia, Italy, Scotland, Germany, Switzerland and other European countries have their several modifications of the boarding out system, attributable to the varying conditions of social life, but conforming in the main to the leading features of the original plan. And although no one of these countries is yet freed entirely from the bane of institutionalism, yet year by year fosterage is becoming more popular, as its beneficent effects become more widely known. In Belgium, so

thoroughly recognized is the value of home training for future citizens, that *all* boys under the care of the state are boarded out, though the girls are in many cases still retained in institutions. In some of the departments of France, the system of fosterage has arrived at the precision of a military organization. Here the child, who would otherwise be placed in a foundling or orphan asylum, is enrolled at birth as an *enfant de la Patrie*, and, whenever possible, is placed at once in a foster home in the country. There his physical and moral welfare and his education are watched over by the *agent de surveillance*, in whose quarterly reports is recorded the history of the child until his twelfth year. He is then eligible for apprenticeship, and he receives from the state a certain sum of money for an outfit. But, in nearly all cases, the affection between the child and its foster parents has become, by this time, so strong that he is either adopted legally, or retained in the family as an apprentice, the money being placed in the savings bank, in order that he may have a little capital to begin the world with on reaching his majority.

Australia has, perhaps, the most perfect system of boarding out yet evolved. As early as 1852, the first Legislature of South Australia decreed that no public money should be given to denominational schools, whether educational or charitable. Twenty-five years ago the state began boarding out its dependent children; the saving to the government, as well as the rapid decrease in the juvenile pauper class, at once made the new departure acceptable, though the law compelling children to attend school throughout the entire year increased the expense of fosterage in Australia beyond that in European countries.

The American poorhouse, from the first, fell into line with the English workhouse in its influence as a breeder of crime and pauperism. The poorhouse child came either from the directly vicious class, or from those "water-logged" families with whom pauperism was hereditary, and, as a rule, he left his early home but to return to it in later life. The enactment of each new law to mitigate the evils of the almshouse only made the idle and vicious parent more eager to accept the advantages thus offered to his offspring, and pauperism increased out of all proportion to the growth of the country.

Outside the almshouses, there was a condition even worse. All over the country, and especially in cities, there arose a class of chil-

dren who anticipated in character the adult tramp of to-day. These were in many cases runaways, to whom the restraints of the almshouse were irksome, and they also formed the larger proportion of juvenile criminals. In 1848, there were, in New York City alone, 30,000 such waifs known as "street children," who had no homes, who begged and stole their food, who slept in the streets, assisted professional criminals in their nefarious practices, and in time were graduated into the ranks of the adult criminal. This menace to society, undreamed of by the more orderly class, was made officially public by the report of the Superintendent of Police, and out of the exigency arose, in 1853, the New York Children's Aid Society, whose president, Charles Loring Brace, grasped with the intuition of genius the true solution of the problem of child saving. When Mr. Brace asked the Chief of Police to confer with him in regard to means for saving these children, the Chief replied that the attempt would be useless. Nevertheless, Mr. Brace began his work; and, knowing that this wreckage of civilization could be saved only by a return to nature, he at once began placing the wards of the Society in homes in the East and West. In 1854, the first company of forty-six children left the office of the Society, the greater number to find homes in Michigan and Iowa. Within the second year, the Society had placed nearly eight hundred children in homes in the Eastern and Western States. The Society has continued its work on the same lines, and through its efforts thousands of men and women have been saved from lives of pauperism and crime. The reports of the Society, which has always kept in touch with its wards, show how fully the faith of its founders has been justified, and how they builded even better than they knew. From out this army of waifs, rescued from the gutter and the prison, there have come the editor, the judge, the bank president, the governor, while thousands of simpler careers attest the beneficence of this noble charity. There is small reason to doubt that, if the guardianship of the entire dependent children of the State had been given over to the Children's Aid Society, the question of juvenile pauperism and crime would long since have been solved. But this was not to be, and almshouses and institutions still retained the greater number of children committed to their care. The evil was greatly augmented by the passage of the now celebrated "Children's Law" in 1875, which contained a clause providing that all children committed to institu-

tions should be placed in those controlled by persons of the same religious faith as the parents of the children. Mrs. Charles Russell Lowell says that: "The direct effect of this provision is found in the establishment of nine Roman Catholic and two Hebrew institutions to receive committed children, all except three having between 300 and 1,300 inmates each."

Within twenty years after this law passed the number of inmates in the twenty-seven institutions benefited directly by it increased from 9,000 to 16,000. In 1889, of the 20,384 children cared for in the city institutions, only 1,776 were orphans and 4,987 half orphans. The remaining 13,621 had been committed by magistrates, many at the request of parents, or had been brought by parents voluntarily to the institution. In Kings County alone, five years after the passage of the "Children's Law," the number of dependent children increased from 300 to 1,479, most of the commitments being made by parents anxious to be relieved of the care of their children, until the wage earning period was reached. Another objectionable feature arose from the greater length of time that children have been retained in institutions, since the passage of the law. With a direct *per capita* income from the State, the institutions have not been able to withstand the temptation to keep their charges as long as possible. The reports of the Comptroller's office for October, 1894, showed that 1,935 children in institutions had been inmates over five years: 55 of these were in Protestant institutions, 268 in Hebrew, and 1,612 in Roman Catholic institutions. The same year showed an average of 567 children in institutions between 13 and 14 years of age, 444 between 14 and 15, and 247 between 15 and 16 years of age. One institution in 1892 had wards twenty-two years old, and was "caring for" 129 youths over 17 years of age. In 1894, it was found that twenty-three per cent. of the dependent children of New York City had been in institutions at public cost over periods ranging from five to fourteen years. A report of the State Board of Charities for 1873, three years before the passage of the "Children's Law," showed that only eight per cent. of the total had been in institutions over five years. An equally striking fact is that, since the passage of the "Children's Law," the number of children placed in families by institutions has greatly decreased. In 1875, out of 14,773 children in institutions, there were 823 placed in families. In 1884, out of 33,558 children in institutions, there

were only 1,370 placed in families. While the population of the State of New York increased but thirty-eight per cent. during the first seventeen years after the passage of the law, the number of children in institutions increased ninety-six per cent.

In New York City, a report of 1894 shows the distribution of its 15,331 dependent children as follows: 1,975 in Hebrew institutions, 2,789 in Protestant, 10,567 in Roman Catholic institutions. This did not include the blind, deaf, feeble minded and delinquent children who are cared for in special institutions.

As opposed to its institutions, the State has, in several of its counties, adopted to some degree the more natural method of child saving, with marked results. Alarmed at the increasing expense of its juvenile institutions, Erie County in 1879 began to take measures for boarding out its dependent children, and through the mediumship of the newspapers the agent placed the needs of the county before the people. He also interested clergymen and editors in the project. Advertising cards with pictures of the children were sent out, and this vigorous canvass resulted in speedy applications for the children, who were sent to good country homes by the score. The agent always impressed upon the foster parents the fact that the child was still the ward of the county, which expected them to co-operate with it in training him to a life of usefulness. The chief opposition came from the institutions, which in many cases refused to let the children go. But the Board of Supervisors met this obstacle by reducing the *per capita* price of board, and by passing a resolution declaring that, if any child was refused to the county's agent, the Superintendent of the Poor would at once stop payment for his board. This opened the doors of the institutions, and Erie County, which in 1879 was paying \$48,000 yearly for the support of its dependent children, had by 1892 decreased its expenses two-thirds, though the population had increased one-third. Monroe, Westchester and Orange Counties also placed out their children to some extent.

When the Revised Constitution went into effect there were 15,000 children, or more, in institutions in New York City, costing the city over a million and a half yearly. The institutions throughout the State received about two millions and a half yearly for the support of their charges. The Revised Constitution gave the State Board of Charities jurisdiction over all the charities in the State, whether public or private, and a law was enacted by the



Legislature putting the placing out of children into the hands of this Board. Under this law, during the years 1896 and 1897, 1,500 children have already been placed in homes in the rural communities. The number of children in institutions has been further decreased by the action of the State Charities Aid Association in appointing examiners to investigate the status of the children already in institutions, or for whom application had been made. The official report of the examiners for 1896 and 1897 shows that, out of 26,561 investigations, 7,303 cases were disapproved, though the children in many cases had been in the institutions for years.

Boys of 12, 13, 15, 16 and 17 years of age were found, whose families were amply able to provide for them, but who had been supported by the State for periods ranging from six to nine years. One girl of 16 was found who had spent twelve years of her life in institutions, being left at the critical age without home ties or interests, and with an utter lack of training in ordinary domestic affairs. The monthly reports from the Comptroller's office show the pecuniary saving from the decrease of dependent children, while the moral gains through the return of these children to the normal ways of life is of course incalculable. Hitherto the State of New York has paid two-fifths of all the money spent in the United States for the care of dependent children, while child pauperism has increased three times as fast as the general population. With a population of one and three-quarter millions New York City has been supporting over 15,000 children in institutions, or one dependent child to every 117 of population. The number of dependent children in Philadelphia in 1894 was one to every 1,979 of its population. This difference arises from the fact that Philadelphia has ceased to be an institutionalized city, and boards or places out nearly all its dependent children, the Philadelphia Children's Aid Society being the agent employed. Nearly every County Poor Board also takes advantage of its aid to place its dependent children, as far as possible, in its care. During the thirteen years of its existence the Children's Aid Society has received about 6,004 children from the various almshouses, poor boards and courts, and placed them in homes in the country. It has the names of over 700 families whose respectability and fitness are vouched for, the Society's agents having visited and ascertained by personal investigation their status in the community. Most of these families are at a distance of at least a hundred miles from any large city, it

being deemed best, in case of delinquent children especially, to bring them up amid strictly rural surroundings. The attitude of the Society towards its charges is that "its duty to the child is not one of mere support, but one of preparation for life," and that the sole question arising in the mind of the observer of city institution life should be, "is the precise thing which I am looking at the very best thing that can be provided, in order that the child may have the same reliance which makes the country boy, on the whole, the best wage earner that the city ever sees?"

The Society possesses thousands of records attesting the happiness and well being of its wards, and the unwritten records obtained through personal visits from its agents are more satisfactory still. The agent finds the little sickly two-year-old, whom she left a few months before hardly expecting to see it alive again, well nourished and radiant with returning vitality, surrounded by toys, dressed in clean clothing, the care and the pet of the whole family. One baby, left at the age of eleven months unable to hold up his head or sit alone, had been restored to perfect health. The foster mother here had expressed a preference for a "real smart baby," one that she could show off to her neighbors. But, as she bent over this tiny sufferer, his little, thin face made its undeniable appeal, and she said, as she cried over him, that "somebody would have to keep him, and she calculated she could do it as well as any one else." The agent carries away innumerable mental pictures of these little waifs who have found home and health in the beautiful hill country of Pennsylvania. She sees the children on the benches of the village school, or sharing the innocent pleasures of childhood in wood and meadow. She finds them in the barn or field with the foster father, picking up useful knowledge, learning ways of industry and honest living, and, above all, sharing the interest of the family as if he were to the manner born. Very often these boarded out children step into a place left vacant by death, and often they bring to a childless home the first knowledge of the privileges and blessings that come with children. The Society has innumerable photographs showing the children in their comfortable homes, studying in the cosy sitting rooms, playing games with the farmer's older boys, or with the farmer himself, and sharing in fact in all the simple and sweet scenes of family life.

A most careful method of supervision is enforced by the Society, not only through frequent visits of its agents, but through

numerous reports made by the physicians, the school teachers and other reliable and interested persons. Question blanks are sent for these reports, which are filed and make a full record of the child's history while under the care of the Society. As far as possible, the children are boarded in families of the same religion as that of their parents. In order not to create a class distinction, the Society does not allow the boarded out children of a village or farming district ever to exceed two or three per cent. of the child population.

Massachusetts, with a population to the square mile exceeding that of New York, and in which the artificial conditions of living are practically the same, has no dependent children, technically speaking, in institutions supported by the State. Largely affected by the problem of immigration, and under the strain produced by great centres of population engaged in mill and factory work, and so removed from the more healthful influences of smaller village and country life, this State has yet so successfully solved the problem of juvenile pauperism that, out of a population of two and a half millions, it has only 2,852 wards to support. The State has a nursery at Roxbury, where destitute infants are cared for while requiring medical or surgical treatment, and where children boarded out are brought for treatment when necessary. The nursery is a temporary home only in the strictest sense of the word, boarding out being the end in view. There is also a temporary boarding place at Arlington, with a capacity for only twenty children, and a home for wayward boys, with a capacity for seventeen. The State has two Industrial Schools, the Lyman School for Boys, and the State Industrial School for Girls, which together cared for 391 boys and girls during the year 1896. There are also two Reform schools, having 397 children in charge. With these exceptions, the dependent children of Massachusetts are placed or boarded out.

In 1889, California paid \$231,215 for the support of 36,000 children in asylums, while Michigan, with double the population of California, paid only \$35,000 for the support of 230 children. In 1893, California, still working under the old system, paid \$250,000 for the support of 40,000 children in institutions, while Minnesota, with a population about equal to California, supported only 169 dependent children in its State Public Schools, the remainder being placed or boarded out.

There are, in all, perhaps eight or nine states in the Union

in which boarding out and placing out are carried on in greater or less degree, these systems affecting about three-tenths of the dependent children in the country. The remaining seven-tenths, numbering more than 70,000, are still in institutions.

The United States is an institutionalized land, and the Great Republic, which boasts of freedom and equality, still regards her dependent children as aliens, and brands them with the stigma of pauperism.

The evolutionist sees the earliest manifestation of altruism in that primary instinct, found even in the lowest forms of plant life, to protect the young in the seed and bud—the instinct of motherhood. Upon this eternal principle of life the problem of child saving must rest. There is no one so morally fit to rear an unfortunate child as the mother of a respectable family, whose experience with her own brood has taught her the needs and demands of childhood. Nowhere else is so abundantly manifested that trust in the “larger hope,” as in the patience that waits upon motherhood. To this patience and this hope the State may well commit the welfare of its most unfortunate class. For, although the institution life of to-day is not accompanied by all the horrors that once disfigured it, yet sore eyes, diseased bodies and a high death rate still prevail. According to the official report of 1897 the death rate at the Infants’ Asylum on Randall’s Island was, for foundlings 80 per cent., for other children without their mothers 59 per cent., children with their mothers 13 per cent. Out of 366 children under six months of age, admitted without their mothers in 1896, only twelve lived, the remainder dying between five and six weeks after admission to the asylum. Institutionalism is an artificial system with the stigma of failure attaching to it, inasmuch as its presence always indicates an increase of the very evil it was originally meant to combat. Without admitting as truth the statement, made by some experts, that all institution bred children turn out either knaves or fools, sufficient testimony may be found to force home the startling argument that, of the 100,000 children cared for by the State to-day, there is grave danger that the seven-tenths who are in institutions will carry through life the brand of a system which has handicapped them in the race for success.

Mr. Homer Folks, Secretary of the State Charities Aid Association of New York, in speaking of child saving, says: “Would the

directors of a bank be satisfied with knowing that most of its funds were not stolen? Would the working of the postal department be considered satisfactory if simply a majority of the letters deposited in the letter boxes were delivered? Would the community rest contented in the satisfaction that a large majority of its citizens were not unjustly thrown into prison? Would a father be satisfied to know that five of his six children were not actually suffering from hunger and cold?" And this is the principle upon which child savers must act. The institution may save the child up to a certain point. But we want him saved for all time. Only the abandonment of the costly institutions—the expensive buildings might with profit in New York City be turned into public schools—and an acceptance of the method which experience has so far shown to be the best, can solve the question of pauperism in the United States with success.

The boarding out system is another example of the truth of the adage that "mercy is twice blessed." The love and care of the foster parents are in large measure repaid by their charges, who yield them in old age that affectionate protection which is the privilege of children. When at service, they save their wages and deny themselves little luxuries, that they may help their foster parents. They come back to their former homes to be married; and, in case of a family, if either parent dies, the survivor brings the children to the foster mother to be cared for. Joy and sorrow are shared together, and when attacked by fatal sickness it is to the foster home that the child returns to die.

Nature, the wise teacher, has sealed her approval of forsterage by forging that mysterious tie which binds parent and child, which no absence may sunder, and which remains unbroken even in death. Boarding out has paid in every sense. Out of the class in which pauperism was hereditary—sometimes three or four generations of the same family being paupers—it has created a respectable working class, at a cost in dollars and cents far below the cost of institution life. Over the neglected and despised pauper child, it has extended the aegis of the State, making the least of these little ones understand that, though deprived of love and home by fate, he has still a motherland whose care will guard him lovingly, and whose honor must be his sacred ideal.

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